

2023 Boston City Council Candidate Questionnaire

JP Progressives * Progressive West Roxbury/Roslindale * Allston/Brighton Progressives

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The public part of the questionnaire contains a mix of yes/no and open-ended questions. Please keep all answers to open-ended questions to no more than 150 words. A non-response to a yes/no question will be treated as a no.

(A) Your Candidacy

1. What would be your top three priorities if elected to serve?

Housing, Environment, and Education

2. What qualifies you to hold this office?

In 2021, voters decided that my personal and professional experience, coupled with my commitment to bring the margins to the center, reflected their vision for our City, and they sent me to City Hall. As an elected official, I am clear on my theory of change and can locate my role within the larger ecosystem of our progressive movements. I have learned how to be discerning when making pragmatic and principled decisions which have made me effective in my role. Our work over the past 18 months has proven my commitment to follow through on campaign promises, and I hope to earn the voter's support again this election.

3. What do you see as the role of the City Council in our strong-mayor system?

In a robust Mayor system, a progressive city councilor's role is to collaborate with the administration when we're rowing in the same direction and push

back on the administration when its policies are misaligned with our residents' needs. As councilors, especially district councilors, we are the closest to the people. We receive phone calls daily, tend to our constituents' everyday concerns, and often support them in meeting their basic needs. We have an intimate knowledge of the most pressing issues in our neighborhoods. For that reason, it is our job to bring that lens into our work. Being a City Councilor in a strong-Mayor system is an exercise in amplifying voice and building power from the ground up.

Beyond the current role of the city council, I believe part of our job is to transition us from a strong mayor system via charter reform, to a system that builds a deeper, more representative democracy by redistributing power to the City Council and then back to the communities we represent.

4. What is the one policy you've seen pioneered in another city that you'd most like to see Boston adopt?

Universal Basic Income: Even before the pandemic brought economic disruption to Boston, serious structural problems existed in the City's economy. Despite a relatively high median income of \$71,834 per household, Boston is currently the 7th most unequal city in the country. The bottom 20% of households live on an average income of \$14,900 annually, below the federal poverty line for a family of two. Cities across the country, including Stockton, California, and Chelsea, Massachusetts, have begun experimenting with basic income experiments aimed at reducing poverty, tackling the economic impact of systemic racism, and creating a more equitable economy. Boston should emulate these successful programs by launching a pilot program to provide direct cash assistance to low-income residents. I would propose a targeted program aimed at the lowest 20% of income distribution that would generate significant economic growth and reduction in household and childhood poverty, currently at 27% in Boston.

Last year, our office worked with the Office of Economic Opportunity and Inclusion to convene a cross-sector panel to create a proposal for a UBI Pilot to give to the Mayor. I hope this work will continue to progress and Boston can join major cities nationwide in tackling poverty head-on.

5. Which of the following groups have you chosen to reject / would reject campaign contributions from?

- a. For-profit developers
- b. Fossil fuel executives or lobbyists
- c. Charter school advocates and lobbyists

d. Police unions

(B) Racial Equity & Community Engagement

1. Name three accomplishments you've been able to achieve to advance racial justice or equity.

I filed a hearing order and began discussions to restore municipal voting rights to immigrants with legal status. Immigrants comprise 29% of the City's population and are integral to the city's social, political, economic, and cultural fabric. However, immigrants with legal status do not have the full ability to participate in municipal elections and have their voices heard.

I've firmly pushed for a Universal Basic Income program. I worked with the Office of Economic Opportunity to convene a cross-sector panel to create a proposal for a UBI Pilot to give to the Mayor.

2. What steps would you take, if elected, to engage all the diverse communities of Boston in policymaking, and what past actions of yours should give voters confidence that you will follow through?

While in office, we've maintained our practice of collectively building policy through community policy ideation sessions. These sessions brought community members together to discuss their visions and ideas for their city across six key policy areas: Justice in Education; Investment in Community Safety; Healthy & Affordable Homes; Environmental Justice; Fair Wages & Equitable Economy; and Strong & Vibrant Culture. We launched our Letters from the Future campaign to actively solicit district residents' input. We recreated the Letters from the Future Campaign for Pride Month last June. The letters we received from queer constituents across the City anchored our Beyond Pride platform and resulted in thousands of dollars in increased investments for LGBTQ+ people in the City of Boston. Our fellows, staff, and volunteers represent the district across demographics, including age, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, and class.

3. The future of democracy depends on robust youth engagement. Describe how you engage youth formally in your work as city councilor, or would plan to do so if elected.

As part of my commitment to expanding the electorate in Boston, I proudly voted in favor of the home rule petition (HRP) to allow 16 and 17-year-olds the right to vote in municipal elections. This HRP was sponsored by my colleagues,

Councilors Mejia and Bok, and stewarded through the Government Operations Committee by Councilor Arroyo. As a former youth organizer and youth worker I know that young people should be at the forefront of our justice movements. Any opportunity I get to engage young people in the electoral process and steward their vision for our city is an opportunity I'll take.

(C) Budget & Revenue

- 1. Do you support dedicating at least 1% of the operating budget to participatory budgeting?**

YES.

- 2. In 2022, almost 75% of Boston's revenue came from property taxes, but half Boston's land is tax exempt. To address this problem, then Mayor Menino created the Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) program, requesting large nonprofit hospitals, educational, and cultural institutions with over \$15 Million in property to pay 25% of their assessed potential property tax to reimburse the city for vital services, snow removal, fire and police protection, and sanitation. Half of that assessment can be fulfilled through provision of a community benefit. Each year fewer institutions pay their full PILOT request, and in the last 12 years, institutions have failed to pay the city over \$175 Million in PILOT requests. How will you work to create a stronger PILOT system that expands community engagement, defines community benefits and creates a fairer system to meet the needs of residents of the city of Boston?**

PILOT reform is incredibly necessary; as it stands, the administration is reviewing the policy. I hope that the review gives us a clear path forward for reform and I look forward to being a champion on the City Council.

- 3. Given state law, Boston is limited in its taxing power. What opportunities do you see for the city to raise revenue?**

A municipal bank presents us with the opportunity to not only use public money for the public good but also to bring a new stream of revenue into the city of Boston.

(D) Education

- 1. What are your top priorities for reducing persistent racial and economic achievement gaps in the Boston Public Schools?**

Racial and economic achievement gaps don't exist in a vacuum. The conditions in our communities directly translate into learning outcomes for our students. If we want to reduce the racial and economic achievement gaps, we must understand that this is not only BPS's issue to resolve. We have to invest in academic excellence like we have to invest in affordable housing, economic development, and mental health support. Closing the achievement gap requires a family and community-first approach to learning. In my work on the City Council, we have focused on bringing our vision of a beloved community to fruition so that our students can thrive in school and reach their full potential.

2. Do you oppose the expansion of charter schools in Boston?

YES.

3. Last year, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education actively considered a takeover of the Boston Public Schools. Do you oppose any such future efforts at state takeover of BPS?

YES.

4. Do you support a change in BPS governance to allow Boston voters the right to elect school committee members, like every other city in Massachusetts? If so, what would your ideal structure be? If not, why not?

YES. I committed to supporting an elected school committee in 2021. I worked with my colleagues, advocates, and stakeholders to create an HRP that helped move the conversation forward. While it did not ultimately advance to the state house, our discussions highlighted the impact an elected school committee would have to reduce the inequities and persistent challenges that BPS faces.

5. The Boston Public Schools district is working on a memorandum of understanding with the Boston Police Department that avoids placing police back in schools but clarifies when educators should call police to respond to incidents. What are your thoughts about such a proposal? Moreover, what would be your priorities in ensuring that BPS is a safe environment for all students to learn?

I'm encouraged by the creation of an MOU with BPD. Codifying our current processes is necessary to ensure that every school community follows the

outlined emergency response protocol to keep all students safe. My one concern, which I've made clear to the administration, is that we must clearly define the parameters by which police intervention is necessary. The definition of an 'emergency' could vary from school community to school community, and codifying these processes without clearly defining the parameters leaves too much open for discretion which could create a bias and increase the presence of police in certain schools.

By signing the Trust Act in 2014, Boston committed to immigrant communities. The Boston Regional Intelligence Center (BRIC) 's ongoing utilization and the coordination between Boston Public Schools, the Boston Police Department, ICE, and deputized School Resource Officers are an offense to that commitment and further the disturbing trend of funneling students out of public schools and into the juvenile and criminal justice systems. To ensure a safe environment for all students, I support eliminating BRIC and severing ties between BPS, BPD, and ICE. Every school is different, and I believe the most effective safety plans come from the community of parents, educators, and students, which is why I strongly support school-specific safety plans in BPS.

6. What steps would you take to make universal pre-K a reality in Boston?

I am supporting Mayor Wu's work to implement this in Boston through the UPK (Universal Pre-K) program she expanded in March 2023. As a parent, I know how important UPK is to our children's development and well-being. Our work is to ensure every child has an available seat once they come of age.

(E) Public Safety

1. Do you support closing the loopholes in Boston's Trust Act which allow BPD to inquire about immigration status or pass information along to ICE?

YES.

2. Do you support shuttering the Boston Police gang database?

YES.

3. Although the Boston City Council is not directly involved in negotiations over the Boston Police Patrolman's Association (BPPA) contract, the City Council does have influence by way of a final vote. What reforms, if any,

would you like to see in a final contract? What, if anything, would make you vote against it?

Over the last decade, the nationwide calls for police reform have highlighted the role of police union contracts—negotiated mainly outside of public view—in limiting or enabling reform, accountability, and fiscal oversight. As the vice-chair of the Public Safety Committee, I held two hearings concerning the BPPA’s contract with the City. The BPPA contract is a policy document. I wouldn’t be fulfilling my duty as a councilor if I voted for a contract that didn’t contain transparent reform on overtime, details, and discipline.

4. Would you support allowing the use of civilians to direct traffic around construction projects and street work as opposed to limiting such work to the Boston Police Department?

YES.

5. Would you advocate for the reallocation of money from the Boston Police Department budget to reinvestment in communities?

YES.

6. Do you believe that affiliation or sympathies with white supremacist organizations among officers is a problem with BPD? If so, what measures would you take to combat that issue?

YES. I believe this issue has been long ignored and, in recent years, has made its way to the public eye. To combat this, I would advocate for the necessary changes to be made to the police contract that would allow officers to be terminated when found out to be members of white supremacist organizations. Specifically, our contracts should leave decisions about whether or not an officer is fit to hold public office to the Commissioner instead of a binding arbitration process. We’ve seen the rise of white supremacist violence and presence, particularly in D6, and we need every possible recourse to root it out.

7. Do you support the legalization of overdose prevention centers?

YES.

8. How would you evaluate the City's response to the humanitarian situation at the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard ("Mass & Cass")?

There is a lot of work to do on Mass & Cass, and the truth is that the City of Boston is shouldering the weight of an entire region with minimal support from our neighboring cities and the State. We need to continue to implement our incredibly effective interventions. Still, we won't be making any progress without the extra support.

9. What would be your priorities in reducing gun violence in the city?

We need to invest in young people before they start to exhibit violent behavior through robust investment in youth programming, youth jobs, and Boston Public Schools. We need to ensure that we are investing in interventions that target impact players with the support they need to be successful.

(F) Environment & Transportation

1. What steps would you take to reduce dependence on cars and better facilitate the ability of Bostonians to get around by walking, biking, or public transit?

I supported Mayor Wu's efforts to expand free bus lines. In addition, my office was central in creating clear information and support for commuters during the Orange Line shutdown last year. My office also partnered with Mothers Out Front and Miles Howard to hike the Boston City Walking Trail to encourage residents to engage with our urban wilds and see how easy it is to travel by foot in many parts of the city.

2. What are your top three policy priorities for making Boston a climate-resilient city, and how would you ensure that equity is at the center of any such efforts?

As chair of the committee on Environmental Justice, Resiliency, and Parks, I've also worked to address immediate problems and solutions that residents of the city see in their day-to-day lives. I've worked to address heat islands, identifying where they are and how we can combat them, and I served as a cosponsor on the ordinance to protect and expand our city's tree canopies.

3. Do you oppose the creation of new fossil fuel infrastructure in Boston?

YES.

4. Do you support expanding the fare-free bus pilots and making fare-free buses permanent in Boston? What steps would you take to achieve this goal?

YES. Bus fares are paid mostly by low-income people - meaning this benefit would go directly to those who need it the most. Making most buses free on the T and every other public bus system in the state could be covered with a 2-cent gas tax increase, according to Livable Streets. Outside of that, continued municipal investment in fare-free transportation and collaboration at the state level would make this a reality for our constituents.

5. Do you support the expansion of the City's curbside composting pickup program?

YES.

(G) Housing

1. How would you expand affordable housing in Boston and ensure development without displacement?

My focus on the City Council has been creating Anti-Displacement Zones in Transit-Oriented Corridors. I convened a hearing alongside Councilor Coletta regarding these zones, creating overlay districts that would establish protections against displacement, specifically with people of color and low-income residents in mind.

2. What opportunities do you see for leveraging city-owned land for expanding affordable housing?

Our office secured \$1 million in ARPA funds to help the East Boston Community Development Corporation acquire 114 housing units in East Boston. The units in triple-decker buildings called the Blue Line Portfolio are now owned by the community-governed institution, the East Boston Neighborhood Trust, the first mixed-income housing trust in the state. The goal is to ensure families occupy these larger units in future leases. 60% of the units will be affordable to those earning 60% AMI or below. The community-led model will permanently preserve affordable housing in East Boston, build community ownership, and remove housing from the speculative market.

- 3. Do you support the City of Boston's Home Rule Petition to establish a small transfer fee on real estate transactions over \$2 million? If so, how do you plan to advocate for it at the State House?**

YES.

- 4. Do you support rent stabilization? Do you believe that the City of Boston's current Home Rule Petition goes far enough, doesn't go far enough, or goes too far -- and why?**

YES. I support Mayor Wu's rent control proposal; some modifications I would make include lowering the percentage cap to CPI plus 3% with a cap of 5%, reducing the number of exceptions, and shortening the number of years allowed for exemptions on new construction from 15 to 10.

- 5. Would you support a Tenant Opportunity to Purchase ordinance, enabling tenants to purchase a building if the owner seeks to put it on the market?**

YES.

- 6. Boston's inclusionary development policy (IDP) requires that 13 percent of the units in a building need to be affordable, and the City is currently considering increasing it to 20%. Do you support such an increase?**

YES.

- 7. Do you support requiring that a majority of new affordable units be built on-site, in order to ensure communities are diverse and integrated?**

YES.

- 8. Across the city, there are projects for large-scale supportive housing that are being fought by local communities, such as the Shattuck project in Jamaica Plain, the Comfort Inn development project in Dorchester, Charlestown's Constitution Inn project, and more. Do you support pushing forward with these specific projects and others like them?**

YES.

(H) Economic Opportunity

1. What steps would you propose to reduce Boston's income and wealth inequality, especially the racial wealth gap?

My entire economic policy is centered on creating a racially just economy. Specific policies I've championed include increasing youth jobs funding - Youth unemployment has spiked to historical levels during the COVID-19 pandemic, aggravating the already large racial disparities that persist in youth employment rates. Investing in youth jobs represents an investment in a more equitable economic future for young people and their families and a better-skilled labor force for the city. Funding youth jobs has also demonstrated an increase in community safety and a direct decrease in violence. I support the expansion of Worker-Owned Businesses because closing the racial wealth gap will require that we use an equity lens and further our economy's democratization. Expanding the equity initiatives for worker-owned businesses, especially those owned by Black folks, people of color, women, and LGBTQ+ workers, will ensure marginalized communities have equal access and opportunity to build wealth. With this in mind, I've advocated for expanding the City's Worker Cooperative Initiative to provide grants, loans, and technical and procurement assistance to start-up worker co-ops. This would also bolster support for businesses that want to transition into a worker-owned model and companies offering employee stock ownership plans (ESOP). I've worked to strengthen Gig Worker Protections. Boston must take action to ensure that workers' rights are centered in our economic policy by enhancing the enforcement of worker protections. Alongside anti-displacement zones, I've worked to implement the Chuck Turner Jobs Act, which builds upon his decades of work to create a more equitable Boston. I hope to sponsor the Act, which includes the creation of Community Stabilization Areas and Committees for any neighborhood with a median income of under \$34,000. These neighborhoods will be targeted for special programs, including, but not limited to, First Source Hiring programs, training on employee rights, and access to quality jobs.

2. Do you support requiring city contractors to give their employees at least two weeks' notice before changing their schedules and to compensate workers for late schedule changes?

YES.

3. What steps can the Council take to achieve greater diversity in City contracting?

Expanding the equity initiatives in the City contracting and procurement

process to include worker-owned businesses and organizations, especially those owned by Black folks, people of color, women, and LGBTQ+ workers, will ensure these communities have equal access and opportunity to build wealth.

This is why I support the demands of the Black Economic Council of Massachusetts. I will set spending goals of 15% for Black-owned businesses and 40% for women- and minority-owned businesses, including LGBTQ+ owners, and direct all City departments and quasi-city agencies to unbundle large contracts set to become available in 2021. In addition to the spending goals, I will expand support to these businesses by ensuring they can access legal assistance when navigating the application process while streamlining and simplifying it.

4. The cannabis industry is expected to grow in Boston in the coming years. What steps should the City take to make sure that it grows in an equitable way, in which the communities most impacted by the drug war are able to benefit?

Host community agreements allow businesses to open, currently, it is tied to a physical location. In order to get a host community agreement, you have to have a physical location. I would explore the possibility of having the host community agreement tied to an individual/business owner. In general, I think that city is doing a decent job with equity in the Cannabis industry. I will work to build a coalition of officials to expunge all cannabis-related convictions.

(I) Democracy

1. How can Boston increase turnout in municipal elections?

We need to strengthen voter education so that people who are eligible to vote feel well informed and understand the impact of local elections. We need to expand the electorate so more people can vote and we need targeted voter outreach in marginalized communities.

2. Do you support allowing non-citizens with legal status the right to vote in municipal elections?

YES.

3. Do you support allowing 16- and 17-year-olds the right to vote in municipal elections?

YES.

4. **Would you support Charter Change to allow for Ranked Choice Voting in Boston?**

YES.

5. **Do you support making hybrid access to public meetings permanent?**

YES.

(J) Additional Comments

(Use this space to make any final comments you deem important for progressive voters assessing your candidacy.)